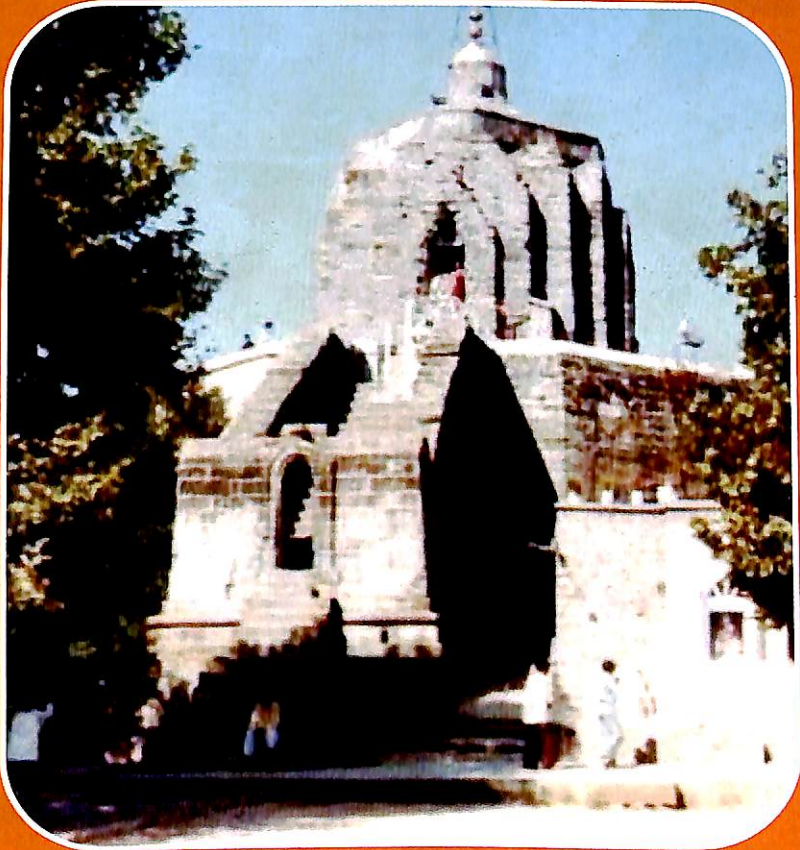




TEMPLES OF KASHMIR



Shankaracharya Temple (Srinagar)

Smt. Vidya Gauri Gadoo Memorial Trust

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Tel. 91-11-22547672

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF MY WIFE

Vidya Gauri Gadoo



(Oct. 12, 2004)

To my wife, **Vidya Gauri Gadoo**

A pious and deeply religious lady, who encouraged me to take the task of serving the community during most turbulent period of early nineties. She was also originally responsible for initiating me into the literary pursuits.



(Oct. 28, 2005)

To my younger brother, **Ved Bhushan Gadoo**

Who encouraged me to take the task of writing about the most important aspect of our culture and religion, especially our temples .

I also take this opportunity to pray for peace to all departed souls of our family & friends.

Jyēsta Ashtāmi,
June 4, 2006

Chaman Lal Gadoo

Dear Reader,
Namaskar,

Kashmir has unique distinction of having most outstanding, legendary, mysterious and inspiring temples. It is our sacred duty to communicate to younger generation about our rich culture and socio-religious heritage during our exile. In this context, Smt. Vidya Gauri Gadoo Memorial Trust has made a humble contribution to compile 'Temples of Kashmir' - a selection of our homeland temples and shrines with their distinct background, for the benefit of readers.

Happy Reading.

Jyēsta Ashtāmi,
June 4, 2006

Chaman Lal Gadoo



TEMPLES OF KASHMIR

ORIGIN OF TEMPLES

According to Hindu Dharma, time is divided into four 'yugas' namely 'Satya Yuga', 'Treta Yuga', 'Dwapara Yuga', and 'Kali Yuga'. It is said in the 'Puranas' 'Satya Yuga' — Age of perfect virtue, there were no temples, for the Gods appeared to the people and helped them directly. In the second Yuga namely 'Treta Yuga', virtue diminished in quality and effect, the Gods appeared in their normal forms to the virtuous and in the ionic forms to others. There were no temples. The pious sages installed ionic forms in their own homes and worshipped them. In the third Yuga, 'Dwapara', when virtue and vice almost vied with each other with equal ardour, the sages installed ionic forms in remote jungles and built shrines over them for the benefit of the pious. In the final and present stage, 'Kali yuga', when vice dominates over virtue, need for the temples was found for people to worship, since it is only the presence in an ionic form that people could seek communion with Gods and invoke their blessings.

The Hindu temples are the abodes of God, where man and God commune. In the Hindu temples 'Param Parmeshwara' is worshipped in forms. The Hindu temples are not prayer houses. In the temples people worship God in its ionic form and establish communion with the absolute being. Hindu Dharma does not accept any unbridgeable distance between God and man. Infact, the whole concept of realization and the unity of the 'Astitiva', in man and the absolute being, God, is the essence of the Hindu Dharma. Devotion in Hinduism is known as Bhakti. It is the essence of worship in the temples. Bhakti assumes expression in temples, where the bond of love, is reflected in form of divinity. Hinduism views existence as composed of three worlds— the first world is the physical universe, the second is the subtle astral or mental plane of existence in which "Devas" or angels live. The third world is the spiritual sphere of the 'Mahadeva', the Deities, the Gods.

The path of Karma is of two kinds. The first is Vedic 'Karm-yoga' where all actions are without the desire for fruits thereof. The second kind is 'Tantric Karmyoga' wherein the mind by worship, salutation and the like becomes riveted on the Lord.



The first is possible only for those with greater stability of mind, while the second is accessible to all and easy to start with. It is this second kind that is known as image worship in Hinduism. Image worship is considered to be one of the best aids to realization. This worship is called 'Puja'. Devotees behold the spiritual presence of their divine Lord in the holy image. Worship is a direct link between the man and Master. It is the voice of the soul. Grace is received from the God when one is consistent in his worship, consistent in discipline, consistent in Bhakti and consistent in devotion. With such a foundation in life, a great Shakti, a force or power, will come from the Lord. This is grace. It is uplifting. It comes unexpectedly. When grace comes, your mind may change and your heart may melt. Your sight will become clear and penetrating. Many have prayed and been answered!

Each form attributed to a Hindu God is a symbol of philosophical ideas. Hindu iconography is a perfect science connecting art and religion. The conception of Nataraja is the greatest work of religious art in the scientific world. The dance of Shiva represents the rhythm and movement of the world spirit. One can witness the dance of Shiva in the rising sun, in the waves of the ocean, in the rotation of the planets, in the lighting, in the thunder and in cosmic 'Pralaya'. The whole cosmic play or activity or 'Lila' is the dance of Shiva. All the movements within the cosmos are His dance. Without Him, no one moves. He dances quite gently. If He dances vehemently there will be 'Pralaya'. He dances with eyes closed, because the sparks from His eyes will consume the entire universe. A great seer has written that "the dance of Lord Shiva takes place in the heart of every individual."

Temples are the cradles of the Indian culture. Science and Arts in ancient India have originated and flourished mostly in temples. Indian society is basically temple oriented. Worship of the holy image is morally purifying, aesthetically charming, emotionally satisfying and spiritually elevating. Regular worshiping in temples [Mandir] with faith and devotion can pave the way for 'Moksha' or release of the soul in its embodied state from all its physical, mental, temporal, spatial and causal limitation. People who attend temple regularly, tend to feel better than those who do not, are less prone to stress and have happier marriages, says a report published in September 1998 by a federal agency of Canada. The report is consistent with other researches indicating



Bhakti to be beneficial for mental health . Mahatma Gandhi said that "Mandirs and images remind us to renew our renunciation and dedication from day to day life. "

In India the worship of Lord Shiva and the Shakti is indefinitely old . The worship of Vishnu is perhaps more modern . In between is the worship of Sun God and 'Ganesha'. We find monumental Sun temple of Konark in Orissa, Modhera in Gujarat, Katarmal in Almora and unique, magnificent Sun temple at Martand in Kashmir. In Rigveda, Sun is termed as the eye of the universe, which oversees all happenings. It is also the source and sustainer of life on earth. Sun-God or Surya was worshiped by Manu. He has ordained that Vedic Mantra Gayatri, addressed to Sun-god as Savitr, be muttered while standing in the morning facing east till sunrise and in the evening in a sitting posture facing west till stars appear in the sky. But the worship of Sun in temples could not last long. 'Ganesha' worship is quite common. Ganesha, the son of Lord Shiva and goddess Parvati is a god to whom every Hindu offers worship on every auspicious occasion. In any Yajina first of all Ganesha is invoked and worshipped. He is the bestower of prosperity and remover of obstacles. He is the Lord of intelligence and accomplishment. The origin of Shiva worship in India is untraceable, but it is said, that it has started from the day when Lord Shiva manifested as a Column of Light (Jyoti) on the hill top of Arunachala (situated at Tiruvanamalai), to reveal the glory of Brahma and Vishnu, who disputed one another as who was greater. In commemoration of Shiva equaling the pride of Brahma and Vishnu, a huge cauldron of ghee and camphor is lit on the summit of the Arunachala on Kartika day when the Sun sets (the month is Kartika and the star of the day too is Kartikai), when Shiva manifested as a column of light. It burns for about 7days, being daily replenished with ghee and camphor offered by devotees. This festival is known as Karthigal Deepam. The number of Shiva temples from Kashmir to Kanyakumari surpass all temples put together.

According to Rudra-Hrdaya Upanishad, the combination of Uma and Sankara is known as Vishnu. In the universe, the males represent Maheshwar and females represent Bhagwati Uma. The apparent universe is in itself the form of Uma and non-apparent universe the form of Maheshwar. The union of apparent – Uma and non-apprent Shanker is known as Vishnu. The word Har + e becomes Hari. Shakti is nothing but purified Buddhi of man



which perceives the whole cosmology as manifestation of Shiva Himself. Shiva and Shakti are inseparable, like moon and moonlight.

Many religious and spiritual leaders have stressed the importance of religion and temples. Swami Vivekananda has said the greatest source of strength for any society is its faith in God. The day it renounces such faith will be the day that society will begin to die. By introducing collective Ganpati Puja, Lokamanya Tilak aroused a unique sense of cultural and national awareness among the people which helped greatly in achieving our independence. Similarly, Kashmiri Pandits launched a major agitation during 1967, to restore a girl, from Shital Nath temple.

ANCIENT TEMPLES OF KASHMIR :

" Kashmir —land of pilgrimages.... It would require endless space to attempt to give list of places famous and dear to all Hindus." Wrote Sir Walter Lawrence in his 'The valley of Kashmir'. Kashmir is full of temples, shrines and pilgrim centers of pilgrimage or 'Teertha'. Almost every mountain peak, cave and spring has a temple dedicated to Lord Shiva and the different forms of Divine Mother Bhawani. Similarly, different temples are on the two banks of river Vitasta (Jhelum). Kashmiri Pandits are known for the worship of Shiv-Shakti .

Lawrence further adds ;'It is dangerous to discuss a great mystery as the Hindu religion, yet I cannot help noticing the important part which the springs and snakes play in their mythology, nor must I omit the fact that Hindus seize with avidity on any abnormal display of the powers of nature. The intermittent springs in Ranbir Singh Pora where the water rises and falls in an unaccountable manner at fixed periods; the Gangajatten hillside in Donsu, dry all the year till September, when it becomes a waterfall; the subterranean fire at Soyam in Uttar Machhipora where the people cook their food over the hot soil, attract numerous pilgrims and are ranked among one of the holy places of Kashmir.' Dr. Francois Bernier, a French traveler, who traveled Kashmir and was greatly impressed by famous shrine of, **Tri Saindheya**, the abode of Gayatri. This sacred shrine is situated nearly 3km. from Kokernag on Anantnag- Ahlan road. The Holy Spring has a small basin, which is about 5feet deep and 5yards wide. It remains dry almost whole of the year, except in



Jeth-Haar. During this period, water appears in the spring automatically and it goes dry again. At first, the water springs out continuously for many days but gradually gets absorbed and reappears. Pilgrims visit this spring during these days and offer prayers. According to Kalhan's Rajtarangini, the spring is supposed to flow intermittently in the month of Jaishtha and Ashara, three times in the day and night and has an account of the analogy thus presented with three fold recitation of the Gaytri (Saindheya).

Temples of Kashmir exhibit unique and distinctive architecture suited to its geographical and climatic conditions. The main features are :

- (1) The temple faces east or west;
- (2) The temples have straight-edged pyramidal roofs in two tiers instead of the curvilinear superstructure of the southern temples;
- (3) The triangular pediments enclosing trefoil niches is on all the four sides of the main shrine;
- (4) The double-chambered gateway matches the central shrine in scale and design.
- (5) The cellular layout with the row of pillars is also of a peculiar style not found elsewhere.
- (6) The temple building was a ritual and every stone laid was consecrated to God by the holy chant of the Brahmins.

The temple at **Lodhau**, situated 20 kms from Srinagar, is in midst of a spring. This temple is said to be the earliest remaining stone structure. It is a plain and a square walled structure. The construction style is simple, circular in plan internally and square externally. It is devoid of any decorations. It has a single opening the entrance of which is arched at the top. There are many more temples, which are either in a spring itself, or adjacent to it, but most popular and sacred is at **Tulamula**, dedicated to Maa Ragina. A great phenomenon observed here is that the colour of the water of the spring changes occasionally with time. There is great faith among the devotees that changing of colours indicate impending good or bad coming days.

In Kashmir a Chinar known as "**BOUIN**", a broken word of Sanskrit "**BHAWANI**", the Goddess who is worshipped by all, is largest, coolest and healthiest tree. Meditators have used its large hollow trunks for meditation over time. The chinar is considered sacred and planted generally at places of worship.



The next stage of temple development is found in the temple at **Narastan**, in district Pulwama, 40 kms. from Srinagar. It has triangular canopies, sunken trefoil niches and the enclosure wall with a prominent gateway.

Another well-preserved Shiva temple is at **Payar**, a small village about 8kms. in south of Pulwama. On the south side of this village surrounded by a few walnut and willow trees near a stream, is an isolated ancient Shiva temple. It is one of the rare architectural design of medeaval Kashmir. It is said to be built during 483 to 490 AD. by king Narendraditya. It is 8feet square internally and 21 feet high including the base. The sanctum is open on all sides and is reached by a single flight of steps on the east side. The doorways are rectangular under a tre-foil arch capped a pediment. On the east, Shiva is seen seated cross legged on a throne, on the west is Shiva Natraj, on the south is Bhairva pursuing some demon, and on the north is three-headed Shiva seated cross-legged. The roof is pyramidal and the super-structure is built of 10 stones only !

The most powerful Hindu ruler who ever ruled Kashmir, Lalitaditya (701-737AD) built a number of new towns with great temples. Pandit Kalhan writes in his Rajatarangini "There is no town or village, no river or lake, no island where the king did not build a sacred foundation." He built the famous and elegant Sun temple at Martand and Parihaskesva at his capital Parihassapura. The Sun temple of Martand is a wonder in stone. Lalitaditya is said to have built four Vaisnava temples—the Muktakesva, Parihaskesava, Mahavaraha and Govardhanadhara, besides a Buddhist monastery and a grand caitya. Once an important center, little of it remains now except the plinths of a Buddhist monastery, a caitya that once enshrined a colossal Buddha image and a great stupa. In fact, he had as his prime minister a Chinese Buddhist named Tsiang-Kiun whose name translated in Sanskrit, was Cankuna. The prime minister constructed a lofty stupa and gold images of Jina (Buddha). A gigantic statue of Muktakesava(Vishnu) was made of gold weighing 84,000 tolas (980 tonnes)! Another statue of Parihaskesava was built with 3,36,000 tolas (3,919 tonnes) of Silver. Lalitaditya built another colossus of Buddha with 1,01,64,000 tolas (11,855 tonnes) of bronze.

The second golden age of temple building was during rule of Avantivarman (855-883AD), the founder of Utpala dynasty



The king established his capital at Avantipura and built two temples, one dedicated to Shiva, Avantisvara and other dedicated to Vishnu, Avantiswamin. The Shiva temple is of the panchayatana type, with the main temple at the center of the Court and four subsidiary shrines at the four corners of the main sanctum. Vishnu temple repeats the plan of Martanda on a smaller scale.

The final refinement of form and a more polished look is seen in temples built by Sankarvarman (883-902AD) who succeeded Avantivarman. He shifted his capital to Sankarapatnam (**Pattan**) and built two temples, Sugandhesa and Sankaragaurisa. These structures reveal a refinement in handling of material, treatment of ornamentation and have a more polished look. The Rajatarangini mentions about three Shiva temples at Sankaravarman. The first larger temple was built by king himself and was named 'Sankara-gaurisvara' the second smaller version named after Sugandha his queen as 'Sugandhesa' and the third temple 'Ratnavardhanesa' was built by his minister Ratanavardhana. The 'Sugandhesa' shrine is 12' 7" square and open on one side only. It has trefoiled niches externally on other sides. These niches contained images. The 'Sankaraqaurisvara' temple is bigger one and has images of Shiva as well as of Lord Ganesha.

By the beginning of the 10th century, the growth of style had come to an end but small shrines continued to be raised. Among the surviving temples of this period, one at **Buniar** is still preserved. This temple stands on a double base similar to other structures of this kind in Kashmir. The quadrangle measures 145' by 119'-6" and consists of 53 cells and the gateway. The gateway is a double chambered structure faced on each open side by a trefoil arch surrounded by a steep pediment. The cells are rectangular, 7' long by 4' broad. Each cell has a single trefoil entrance enclosed in a high-pitched pediment resting on half engaged columns. In the center of each range of cells except the one in which the gateway stands, is a apartment of larger dimensions preceded by a pair of taller columns which are advanced about 4' from the rest of peristyle. Another temple named as Dhethamandir (ruined temple) lies further below Buniar. Its central shrine is built in green limestone and coated with lime plaster.

There was a tradition in Kashmir of building temples of wood also. But, there is not a single surviving ancient wooden temple, perhaps, wood is perishable material. Kalhana mentions



devastating fires in Srinagar and the worst one that occurred in 1123AD which engulfed Shrines, Maths, houses and burnt even shops. Dr. Ernst Neve, the famous medical missionary of Kashmir, observed "Ancient India has nothing more worthy of its early civilization than the grand ruins of Kashmir which are pride of Kashmiris and admiration of travellers. The massive and elegant in architecture may be admirable in parts of India, but nowhere to be found counterpart of the classically graceful yet systematically massive edifices as in Kashmir temple ruins."

While concluding "Kashmir and Related Schools" in "The Art of Ancient India" Susan Huntington records "The Buddhist and Hindu art of Kashmir came to an abrupt end when the Muslims became the dominant political force in the region around 1339, when Shah Mirza, a Muslim adventurer, overthrew the Lohara dynasty and major patronage was no longer available."

SARADA TEMPLE :

नमस्ते शारदे देवी, कश्मीर पुर वासिनी ।

त्वां अहं प्रार्थये नित्यं, विद्या दानं देहिमे ।।

O Goddess of Learning, Sarada, Your Abode Being Kashmir I, Salute Thee and Pray You Always To Bestow Knowledge Unto Me"

In the ancient times in Kashmir, there was a great temple, called Sarada or Saraswat temple; presently the temple is in shambles. In the temple premises there existed one of the best manuscripts on Saraswats and their way of living. According to Prof. Bhuller, the manuscripts of Kashmir were found in this very temple. Kashmiri Pandits are offspring of Rishis and belong to the order of Brahmins, the Saraswats. Kalhan's Rajtarangini records in the chapter 'The Shrine of Sarada' as "The temple of Sarada rises in prominent and commanding position above the right bank of the Madhumati on the terrace-like foot of a spur which descends from a high pine-clad mountains to the east. Immediately below this terrace to the North West is the spot where the waters of the Madhumati and the Kishanganga mingle. There, on a sandy beach, the pilgrims perform 'Shradhas' to their ancestors. From the height of the staircase, which forms the approach of the



temple from the West, an extensive view opens . To the South East, the valley of the Mudhumati is seen narrowing gradually into a gorge between precipitous spurs through which passes the direct route to Kashmir . In the North East from where the Kishen ganga flows, successive ranges of barren steep mountains with snowy peaks behind them seem to close all passages. To the North , a narrow chasm in the rocks marks the debaucher of the Sangam river, the Kankatotri of the map , which flows form the mountains towards Cilos and falls into the Kishenganga a short distance above the Madhumati." It is the Saraswati of Kalhan's description, still known by that name to local traditions.

Excerpt from the news report in The Daily, Nov.12,1999,"The Saraswati emerged as a mighty river from the Himalayan glaciers about 10,000 years ago. It coursed through north-western India and drained into ancient Arabian Sea before vanishing into oblivion after 4,000 years of glorious existence." According to 'History Of The Dakshinatya Saraswats ' Saraswats are from the banks of the Saraswati.... This river is found to be more important in vedic period than other rivers including the Ganga. The Vedas were composed 'mostly on its banks and it is described as the most mighty river .The veda describes her as "limitless, undeviating, shining and swift -moving." The Vedic Brahmins were Kashmiri Pandits and are identified as belonging to the group of Saraswat Brahmins. Saraswati called Sarada is the goddess of learning , music and beauty. Sarada in Sanskrit is an appellation for Saraswati as well as Durga .It is said that goddess Sarada esponded to prayers descended on the peak facing the Madhumati - Kishanganga in Kashmir to ensure 'Bhoga' and 'Moksha' for the 'Sadhakas'. The goddess enables its worshipers to be both creative and communicative so as to understand religion and its philosophy. Sarada temple became epicenter of religious philosophy.

Kashmiri scholar Bilhana, fellow – poet of Kalhana mentions in his description of Pravarapura (Srinagar) about Sarada tirath Shrine and Sarada Peet as great center of learning. He left Kashmir in 1066AD during the reign of king Kalsa (1063 to 1089) to become chief pandit of Karnata (Mysore). Bilhana has mentioned this Shrine with great devotion and Jain Scholar Hem Chandra (AD1088-1172) has also mentioned in 'Prabhavakacarita' about this great temple. Another reference to Sarada by Jonaraja , a writer of 14th and 15th century 1389-1459



AD who updated Rajtarangini mentions in his chronicle, Zain-ul-Abidin (Badshah) visited shrine in 1422 AD to witness the miraculous manifestations of the Goddess. In 16th century, Abdul Fazl writes, "At two days distance from Hayahom is the river named Madhumati, which flows from the Darda Country. On its banks is a stone temple called Sarada, dedicated to Durga and regarded with great veneration. On every eight tithi (Ashtami) of the bright moon, it begins to shake and produces the most extraordinary effect." Kalhana indicated the exact location of the shrine where, in course of time, "a huge temple complex came up." Some chronicles mention presence of an idol of Sarada made of wood inside the temple. The shrine of Sarada stands on a hexagonal Spring (19'-13") which is covered with a stone slab. The temple had been surrounded by a wall 11 feet high. The main temple stood in the middle and in architecture, it resembles Kashmir Temples. It had a square plinth, 24 feet in length. From ground level, it was 5 feet high. The temple door faced the setting sun. One had to traverse stairs to enter the temple. The stair was 5 feet wide. A 4 feet varanda supported by two pillars lead to the door. The pillars were 2 feet 4 inch square and reached a height of 16 feet. The prayer room of temple was 12 feet 3 inch square. In the middle is the covered spring. This is the place where devotees worship and the sacred spot where the goddess appeared in her divine form is marked by a stone slab 7 feet long, 6 feet wide, half a foot thick. The stone is supposed to cover a 'Kunda' or spring from where the goddess rose and gave Darshan to Muni Shandalya then finally vanished in.

The saint Shandalya with Maa Sarada's blessings became great Rishi and Gotra Pravartak. He composed many hymns and wrote stotras on Sarada Devi. His seat and Sri Chakra are worshiped in the shrine. Sri Chakra form of Mother Goddess, in her form of Shakti, is associated with Chakrashwari (Hari Parbat). Sri Chakra is worshiped at Hari Parbat also in the cosmic form of Divine Mother. As per our religious scriptures this form is cosmic yoga of the goddess, tantric in nature, which is adopted while fighting evil. Close to temple there had been a great center of learning as Sarada used to be the abode of scholars and Pundits of high vedic learning. Adi Sankara had also visited this temple. There he vanquished many learned disputants and seated himself triumphantly on the throne of omniscience.



The famous Vedanta scholar Acharya Ramanuj also visited this temple and great place of learning in 12th century AD.

Dr. Max Mullar, the great German Sanskrit scholar writes, it was the only Sarada learning center in India where there was arrangement for teaching Indian philosophy, which we call six systems of Indian philosophy. A prestigious education center based on Gurukul system flourished here. When and who built this grand and majestic temple at Sarada remains a mystery. The temple was repaired by Maharaja Gulab Sing under whose orders Col. Gundu, the Zildar of Muzaffarabad erected a shingle roof over the temple for its protection. The Maharaja also settled a small bounty of seven rupees "chilki" per mensem on the family of Gotheng Brahmins who claim the hereditary guardianship. This holy shrine is situated between 34 degrees 48' North and 74 degrees 14' East longitude, on banks of Kishanganga now called Nelam in Pakistan. It is about 100 kilometers from Srinagar and is situated at a height of about 3400 meters. The shrine is now in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. The pilgrims approached it through two principal routes of Kupwara and Muzaffarabad (POK). Nobody has visited this holy shrine for a long time now.

Shankaracharya Temple :

One of the oldest and famous stone temples of Lord Shiva in Kashmir is Shankaracharya temple. It is located in the heart of Srinagar on a hilltop about 1000ft above the ground level, overlooking Dal Lake with beautiful surroundings.

Swami Vivekananda visited Srinagar in 1897. He described this most conspicuous temple : "Look ! what genius the Hindu shows in placing his temples! He always chooses a grand scenic effect! See, the hill commands the whole of Kashmir."

The temple was originally built by King Sandhiman of the Gonanda Dynasty of Kashmir in (2605-2540 BC) . He gave the name "Jeshteshwara " and the hillock "Sandhiman Parbat". According to Dr. Stein, King Gopaditya (369-309 BC) repaired the temple and the hillock was re- named "Gopadari" or Gopa Hill. However, the name of the temple remained unchanged. King Lalitaditya (701-737 AD) repaired it again.

The temple is a massive stone structure built on a high octagonal plinth about 30 feet high. The basement is of 13 layers of stone and is about 20 feet high on the solid rock. The square



building of the temple is supported by the basement. It has 84 recesses on its exterior and is surrounded by a parapet enabling devotees to have the Parikrama of the temple. The stairs leading to sanctum sanctorum number 36, first flight of 18 steps followed by 12 steps and again followed by 6 steps on either side of the landing terminating the second flight.

The present super structure, the interior of which is about 4 meters in diameter, is said to have been built by an unknown Hindu devotee during the reign of Emperor Jahangir. The original Shiva Lingam in the temple, along with over 300 precious idols of Gods and Goddesses therein and other structures around the temple, were destroyed by Sultan Sikandar (the Iconoclast) who ruled Kashmir (1389-1413 AD). It was repaired during Sikh regime and latter by Maharaja Ranbir Singh, the second Dogra ruler of Kashmir. The Maharaja of Indore electrified it.

The temple was originally connected with the river Jhelum near the temple of Goddess Tripurasundari on its right bank known as Shudashyar Ghat by a finely sculptured stone stair up to the top of the hill. Emperor Jehangir dismantled this flight of steps and the stones were used by his queen, Noor Jehan, to built a huge mosque, known as Pathar Masjid. Sunni Muslims never used this mosque for prayers as a Shia woman had built it.

In her book "The Cities Seen in East and West", Mrs. Walter Tibbits says in the chapter "The City of Sun" that; "The hill is rough and jagged as the path of Yoga. The elements have stained it every shade of ochre, the colour sacred to the Lord of the universe. Sharp rocks break the path as the trials of the way cut and wound the feet of the aspirant to knowledge. On its summit stands in simple, solemn dignity a small fane of grey stone. Its columns are fluted, its dome is round, surmounted by a trident, Inside is one thing only, an upright black stone... The Lingam is the oldest religious symbol in the world. It is also the simplest." The British researcher Sir Walter Lawrence has remarked "while the old Hindu buildings defy time and weather, the Muslman shrines and mosques crumble away."

Sri Adi Shankaracharya, a great philosopher, a saint of high order exponent of Vedanta, visited Kashmir in first quarter of 9th century (788-820 AD), for advancing his Vedantic knowledge. He along with his party camped outside the city of Srinagar without any boarding and lodging arrangement. Seeing the plight



of visitors, a virgin was sent to meet Shankara. She found the party uneasy and frustrated because of not being able to cook as no fire was made available to them. The first glimpse of Shakti was exhibited to Shankara by this girl, when Shankara expressed his inability to make a fire, in reply to girl's question that you are so great, can not you make fire. The girl picked up two thin wooden sticks into her hands, recited some mantras and rubbed the sticks and fire was produced to surprise of Shankara. Later a religious discourse was arranged between Shankara and a Kashmiri Pandit woman. This discourse continued for 17 days. Sri Adi Shankaracharya yielded before the woman in discussion and accepted the predominance of Shakti Cult. He composed the well known hymn called Soundarya Lahari in praise of Shakti, at the top of the hill, known till then as Gopadari Hill. Kashmiri Pandits dedicated this hill and temple in honour and memory of his visit to Kashmir, thereafter it is known as Shankara- charya hill and Shankaracharya temple. The Shiva linga which is now worshiped in the temple is the modern one and was installed in 1907. The original image, which existed was a linga encircled by a snake. Koshur Encyclopedia published by J & K Academy records ; "Behind Shiv Lingam at Gopadri (Shankaracharya temple) is statue of Adi Shankaracharya, which has been installed in 1961." By Shankaracharya DwarkaPeeth.

During April 1903, Sri Aurobindu, a great seer and Yogi visited Kashmir. He described the glory and divinity of Shankaracharya temple in a poem Adwaita and is reproduced as;

*"I walked on the high-wayed seat of Solomon,
where Shankaracharya's tiny temple stands,
Facing infinity from Times edge alone,
On the bare ridge ending Earth 's vain romance,
Around me was a formless solitude
All had become one strange un nameable,
An unborn Sole Reality World —nude,
Topless and Fathomless, for ever still,
A silence that was being's only word,
The unknown Beginning and the voiceless end,
Abolishing all things, movement—seen or heard,
On an incommunicable Summit reigned,
A lonely calm and void unchanging peace,
On the dumb crest of nature's mysteries".*



Sun Temple Of Kashmir :

There are very few Sun temples in India. The most important Sun temple is Konark in Orissa. Modhera in Gujarat and Katarmal in Almora (Uttanchal) are equally important. Sun temple in Kashmir at Martand is unique, magnificent and architectural marvel. Martand is one of the earliest and yet largest of the Kashmiri stone temples known to have a chain of pillars. On its right and left are some rooms meant for meditation. In the central temple, the images are desecrated and broken, but this central portion is exquisitely grand beyond description. Martand is about 64 kms to the southeast of Srinagar. The temple at Martand dedicated to the Sun is the most perfect construction with high technical accomplishments. The proper temple is 63 feet in length by 36 feet in width at the eastern end. The width at the entrance end is only 27 feet. It consists of a courtyard with principal shrine in the middle and a colonnaded peristyle. The latter is 220 feet long and 142 feet wide. It has 84 fluted columns facing the courtyard. The peristyle is the largest example of its kind in Kashmir. In main shrine, there are three distinctive chambers; the *mandapa*, the *antara* and the *garbhagriha*. Another distinctive feature is the imposing gateway, as imposing as the main shrine. The walls of the gateway are profoundly decorated internally and externally, the chief motif of decoration being rows of double pedimented niches. Most of these niches contain single standing figures of Gods.

According to Hardy Henery Cole, Martand temple was built by Samdha Arya (35 BC). Some believe that it had been the Raja Ramdev of Pandva dynasty who first built the original temple devoted to Sun God. Many subsequent kings repaired and renovated the temple complex. The remains at Martand probably date from the period of Lalitadita (701-737 AD). The Rajatarangini is quite explicit on the subject, for in the section on Lalitadita it states that "That liberal king built the wonderful (shrine) of Martanda, with its massive walls of stone within a lofty enclosure (prasadantar)," further it reveals that the temple was dedicated to the deity of the sun, Surya, who is called Martanda in the text." Other rectangular panels contain sitting groups, floral scrolls, pairs of geese etc. Susan Huntington wrote in "The Art Of Ancient India," about the Sun temple that it is rectangular in plan,



consisting of a *mandapa* and a shrine. Two double shrines flank the *mandapa* on the western end. It is enclosed in a vast courtyard by a peristyle wall having 84 secondary shrines in it. Its courtyard was often used for defence purposes in the ancient past, a sort of a fort and a place of refuge. According to Rajatarangini, it was King Kalsha (713-750) who had taken refuge in this temple and had installed the idol made of gold. Fergusson speaks of King Jaisima (1128-1149) who also had taken refuge in this temple.

According to W.R. Lawrence, "The ruins of the Hindu temple of Martand, as it is commonly called, the Pandav-Koru House-the Cyclopes of the east are undoubtedly occupying the finest position in Kashmir. This noble ruin is most striking in size and situation of all the existing remains of Kashmir grandeur." He further writes, "There are in all eighty four columns, a singularly appropriate number in a temple of the sun. The number eighty four is accounted sacred by the Hindus in consequence of its being the multiple of the number of days in the week with the number of signs in the Zodiac."

At the foot of the Martand, Kereva is the original shrine of Martanda. The shrine is marked by two springs, Kamla and Vimla. The springs are full of fish, but nobody ever has eaten those. Water which comes out in the form of a canal is called Chaka Nadi. Kashmiri Hindus and also from Northern belt used to visit this place to perform last rites of their deceased souls.

The Pandits of Martand used to keep written record of pilgrims visiting the shrine, similar to Pandits of Haridwar, Gaya, and Sangam (Allahabad). These records are of great source of information about the ancestral lineage.

The Kashmir temple to all intents and purposes is a manifestation of an independent ideal.

MYSTERIOUS CAVE TEMPLE OF SWAMI AMARNATH:

Pandit Kalhan, the greatest and earliest historian-poet completed in AD1150, his immortal work of 7,844 verse Rajtarangini-"River of kings", the history of ancient Kashmir in a detailed manner. According to Rajatarangini the most famous pilgrimage in Kashmir is the cave of Amarnath and mentions that King Ram Deva is stated to have imprisoned the debauch King



Sukh Deva and to have drowned him in the Lambodheri (Lidder) among the mountains of Amarnath about 1000BC. It also mentions in Tarang II, Samdimat (Arya Raja) 34BC-17AD, a great devotee of Shiva who rose from the position of a minister to be the king of Kashmir, "used to worship a Linga of snow above the forests, which is not to be found elsewhere in the world during the delightful Kashmir summers," it further states in verse 267 that Shushram Naga (Sheeshnag) is seen to this day (i.e. 1148-49AD) by pilgrims proceeding to Amreshvara." As per ancient literature devotees of Lord Shiva from time immemorial worshiped cave temple of Amarnath. It is recorded that Himalayan caves have been abode of celestial beings and great sages used to meditate for hundreds of years in these caves. It is also recorded that the Himalayan mountain range especially the northern range is indeed the first and the sublimest symbol of divinity. "Of the mountains, I am the Himalaya" says Lord Krishna in the Bhagwat Gita. Someone asked Swami Vivekananda, "Why have we so many Gods and Goddesses?" He promptly replied, "Because we have Himalaya." The music of the Himalayan streams brought divine feelings to the seers. The rushing streams fall like thunder with the sound of *Vyom*, *Vyom* on the rocks and the flow out in frightening speed with the sound *Hara, Hara*.

Probably Adi Shankara, inspired by snow clad Himalayan peaks and ice Lingam of Shiva at cave temple of Amarnath wrote of Shiva ; " Oh, Shiva, Thy body is white, white is Thy smile, the human skull in Thy hand is white. Thy axe, Thy bull, Thy earrings, all is white. The Ganga flowing out in foams from your matted locks is white. The crescent moon on Thy brow is white. O, all white Shiva, give us the boon of complete sinlessness in our lives."

Swami Vivekananda wrote about Shiva of Amarnath;

*For whom all gloom and darkness have dispersed ,
That radiant light, white beautiful,
As bloom of lotus white is beautiful,
Whose laughter loud sheds Knowledge luminous*

The worship of the Linga according to Vivekananda, was originated from the famous hymn in the Atharva-veda Samhita sung in praise of the Yupa-Stambha which represented the 'Eternal Brahman'. The fire, the smoke, the ashes, flames, the blackwood and the ox connected with this Vedic sacrifice gave



place to the conceptions of brightness of Shiva's body. His tawny matted- hair, His blue throat and the riding on the bull of Shiva and so on—just so the Yupa-Stambha gave place to the Shiva-Linga and was deified as the high Devahood of Sri Shankara.... In the Linga-Purana the same hymn is expanded in the stories meant to establish the glory of the great Stambha and the superiority of Mahadeva."

In ancient scriptures, it is recorded that Maharishi Bhrgu was the first person to sight and identify the cave temple of Swami Amarnath where Lord Shiva had narrated the secret of Amartav to his consort Parvati and got himself transformed into ice Lingam on Sharavan Purnimashi. This sacred day falls every year on the night of the full moon in the month of Sawan (July – August) on Shrawan -Purnemashi, when sun is in Leo, 'Simha' Rashi and Chandrama, moon in Kumb 'Aquarius' Rashi, this yoga makes the Shiva-Lingam darshan very auspicious. A pair of snow pigeons overheard Shiva's discourse and became immortal. Thus Amarnath, the Lord of Immortality and Deathlessness became Amreshvara. !"

On August 2, 1898 Swami Vivekananda had Darshan of Amarnath. When he entered the shrine, a profound mystical experience came to him and latter he said, 'Shiva Himself' had appeared before him'. He further said; " the ice Lingam was Shiva Himself. It was all worship there. I never enjoyed any religious place so much, so beautiful, so inspiring ."

Swami Ramatirtha, on having a glimpse of 'Amareshwara Linga' uttered in ecstasy an Urdu couplet, which means;

*"Where ice is bedecked in formless movement,
There stands supreme-consciousness as Amar Linga"*

The cave temple is located in South Kashmir (34.12' :75.07') at an altitude 12,720ft about 140 kms from Srinagar. The huge natural cave is about 25 meters high and enough to hold hundreds of devotees where a self-forming 'Ice Lingam' waxes and wanes with moon. The holy cave is 50' long 25' wide and 15' high approximately. The cave is nature's temple where 'Ice Lingam' is completely filling the right corner of the cave, the top of the Lingam touches the base of the cave. The base of the cave is also covered with ice, like a carpet. Here Shiva is worshipped by nature in the purest way. Shiva is snow-white and pure. Lingam is formed by drops of water falling from the top of the cave and



two other small 'Ice Lingams,' are also formed, believed to be the symbols of Goddess Parvati and Lord Ganesha. The dripping that followed from the feet of 'Ice Lingam' or 'Shiva Lingam' took form of a stream known as Amuravati. According to Bhṛngish Samhita a person who bathes in the waters of Amuravati and rubs himself with the ashes gets Moksha.

Pandit Kalhana describes in verse 267 of Rajtarangni; 'The lake of dazzling witness (resembling) a sea of Milk, which he created (for himself as residence) on a far off mountain, is to present day seen by the people on the pilgrimage to Amreshvara.'

Francios Bernier, was the French physician who accompanied emperor Aurangzeb to Kashmir in 1663. He has mentioned about cave temple, "a magnificent cave full of wonderful congelations". Vigne in his book 'Travels in Kashmir, Ladakh and Iskardu' (1842) says; "The ceremony at the cave of Amarnath takes place on the 15th of the month of Sawan (28th July)....not only Hindoos of Kashmir but those from Hindoostan of every rank and caste can be seen, collecting together and traveling up the valley of Lider towards the celebrated cave." Lawrence mentions in 'Valley of Kashmir'; "Pilgrims to Amarnath were joined by Brahmins of Mattan and further up to Batkot the Maliks used to take charge of the pilgrimage."

On the night of the 11th day of the bright fortnight of Sawan (July-August) all pilgrims assemble at Pahalgam. Swami Vivekananda describes the on going pilgrimage as; "The procession of several thousands of pilgrims in far-away cave of Amarnath, nestled in a glacial gorge of the Western Himalayas, through some of the most charming scenery in the world, is fascinating in the extreme. It strikes one with wonderment to observe the quiet and orderly way in which a canvas town springs up in some valley with incredible rapidity at each halting place with its bazaars and broad streets running through the middle and vanishing as quickly at the break of dawn, when the whole army of gay pilgrims are on their march once more for the day. Then again the glow of the countless cooking -fires, the ashes covered Sadhus under the canopy of their large geru (orange) umbrellas pitched in the ground, sitting and discussing or meditating before their dhunies (fire), the Sanyasis of all order in their various garbs, the men and women with children from all parts of the country in their characteristic costumes, and their devout faces, the torches shimmering at night fall, the blowing of conch-shells and horns, the



singing of hymns and prayers in chorus, all these and many other romantic sights and experiences of a pilgrimage, which can be met with nowhere outside India, are most impressive and convey to some extent an idea of the overmastering passion of the race for religion. Of the psychological aspect and significance of such pilgrimage, done on foot for days and days, much could be written. Suffice it to say, that it is one of those ancient institutions which have above all, kept the fire of spirituality burning in the hearts of the people. One sees here the very soul of the Hindu nation laid bare in all its innate beauty and sweetness of faith and devotion."

According to Amreshvara Mahatmaya some of the important places where pilgrims had to perform ablutions while on pilgrimage were Anantnaga, Mach Bhawan (Mattan), Ganeshbal (Ganeshpora, 6800ft) Mamleshwara (name of Lord Shiva), (Mamal, 7300ft), Nilganga, Chandanwari, Shushshram Naga (Sheshnag), the pilgrims have to cross at Vayujana (Vowjan), from Lidar to Sind valley, then to Panjarni, and finally to Amuravati. Nowadays the journey starts from Pahalgam (7500ft). The next halt which is at Chandanwari (8500ft) is 10kms. away. The old name of the place is 'Sthanuashrama'. 'Sthanu' is an epithet of shiva and literally it means 'a pollard'. Lord Shiva sat in samadhi like a pollard in the lap of Himalaya where 'Deodar' grew. From Chandanwari to Pisu Gathi (12200ft) is steep hill of 2kms. and then 7kms. away is Seshnag (13148ft) the next halting point. The Seshnag lake 25sq.kmrs. in area, is fed by the Kohenhar glacier (5178 mtrs.) which looks like hood of a cobra. The milky-water of the lake is seen just 200mts. Down in a trough-shaped basin. The mountain around Seshnag is covered with snow and it has seven peaks which resemble the seven heads of mythical Seshnag. From Seshnag to Panchatarni (12230 ft) is about 7kms. In between is 5kms climb, to Maha-gunas, the highest peak in the whole track. This is the last halting place for pilgrims. From Panchatarni to holy cave (12729ft) is 6kms. Panchatarni is a wide plain among the mountain ranges, where five streams flow side by side. Going across these streams there is the sixth stream in which pilgrims perform 'Shradha.'

The whole Amarnath pilgrimage procession is conducted under the auspices of Chhari Maharaj. Bringesha Samhita records, that Rishi was once approached by the people praying to show them the path to salvation. The sage advised them to take



pilgrimage to cave temple of Amarnath and pray to Shiva Lingam. To ensure safe journey to cave temple, Bringesha Rishi prayed to Lord Shiva, and was graced with Holy mace pair. Ever since this became symbol of protection for the yatrics and has now taken the form of Chhari- Maharaj—the holy mace, and leads the annual yatra. The Chhari generally used to leave after performing the Puja at Dashnami Akhara (Srinagar) on the 4th day of the bright fortnight of Sawan. During Sikh rule in Kashmir 'Chhaari Maharaj' used to start from Amritsar, during Dogra rule from Srinagar and now after the exile of Kashmiri Pandits from valley it is from Jammu. The Mahants who wield the divine command of holy place carry the two holy maces and when the Mahant after the prayers at the cave temple takes his seat a Sadhu holding one of the mace stands on his right and other on his left. Despite the terrorist activities in Kashmir and their targeting Yatra, large number of pilgrims throng to Holy Cave Temple of Swami Amarnath, year after year.

THE SACRED TEMPLE OF MAHARAJNI, TULAMULLA.

The most sacred, oldest and important temple dedicated to Divine Mother in Kashmir is of Maharajni (Kheer Bhawani) also known as Tripura Sundri at Tulamulla about 24kms in North East of Srinagar in Gandherbal Tehsil of Sindh valley. There are many references of this temple in Kalhan's Rajatarangni. The holy spring of Tulamulla is situated on the bank of a branch of river Sindh, called according to Nilamat Purana, "Tsandara Baga." A curious phenomena observed here is that the water of this mysterious spring changes colours occasionally like purple, light green, faint rosy, milky white and so on. It is said that black colour is inauspicious and is indication of bad and hard times ahead. The Ragina Kavach—a psalm in praise of the Divine Mother included in Sanskrit work of Rudrya Mala Tantra substantiates that Tulamulla is an ancient and popular place of pilgrimage among Kashmiri Pandits. Rishi Brngisha was the oldest source of information related to the pilgrimage centers of Kashmir. The Brngisha Samhita is now untraceable. Dr. Bhullar had traced some 16 manuscripts from Brngisha Samhita related to the holy places of Kashmir. One of them is TULMUL and mentions in detail about this sacred shrine of Divine Mother. It is approachable both by road and river. This is a spiritual journey and has great significance. While going to Kheer Bhawani first we reach 'Vicharnag'—the lake of



discrimination, then to 'Tyangal-Bal'—the hill of burning charcoals, next 'Kavaj-Var'—the fire of cremation ground and 'Amar-Haer'—the immortal staircase. These names denote renunciation. The third place is Aanchar Lake which derives its origin from Aachar—righteousness. Finally, we reach to our destination—Divine Mother, the abode of Love and Truth.

Shri Parmananda Research Institute (Srinagar) in their publication Shri Shri Maha—Rajni Pradurbhavah (A leaf from Brngisha Samhita) has given detailed version of Mata Kheer Bhawani, so has many more publications. Accordingly, the origin of this temple has been described in last chapter of Brngisha Samhita. It is said Pandit Pulastya father of Ravana, the demon-king of Lanka, was originally from Kashmir. He worshiped Mata Maharajni, even Ravana also worshiped the Mata but in the form of Shyama. The Divine Mother bestowed Ravana, a great devotee, many boons. At the time of invasion of Lanka by Sri Ram, Ravana tried to invoke the blessing of Goddess by offering her various kinds of sacrifices. Thereupon the Goddess cursed him and ordered Hanuman to take her on the back of Anant serpent to Satisar (Kashmir). Thus Mata came to Kashmir with 360 serpents (Nagas). The night when the Divine Mother came to Kashmir is called Rajni-Ratri and Goddess is worshipped as Maharajni.

Pilgrim Centers are called 'Teertha' in Sanskrit. It literally means a Holy Shrine on a bank of a river, spring or any other water source. Pilgrimage in Sanskrit is called 'Teerthayatra'. We undertake pilgrimage with great humility and surrender before the divine. Swami Vivekananda desired that every one of us should rise from animality to divinity so that divinity is manifest in all our thoughts, words and deeds. It is precisely this that the pilgrimages help us to achieve. They are also of great source of our spiritual inspiration and main strength of our faith and devotion.

For a long time the 'Teertha' at Tulmul remained under flood waters. There is a legend that some time ago, the Divine Mother appeared in a dream to Pandit Govind Joo Gadoo and was ordered to visit Tulmul—the swampy side of Aanchar Lake. He arranged a boat, from Sowura Ghat and went to abode of Divine Mother with a number of earthen vessels filled with milk, when he found the spring he poured milk (Kheer) into it. Perhaps for this reason this shrine is known as Kheer Bhawani. Another version is that a pious Brahman, Krishna Pandit, found mention of this Holy spring in a book called 'Brihad Katha', latter he had a vision in



which he was informed by an angel that the holy spring of Mata Maharajni lay among the swamps of Tulmulla village. He was further advised to move towards the north east direction following a serpent from Shadipor and this actually happened. Shri Krishna Pandit marked the place where the snake stopped then he moved in an oddly rectangular direction, the space thus covered by it was also demarcated. Thus was the HOLY KUND of Kashmir discovered. The swampy area around the Holy spring was filled up. Thereafter, a stone walled temple was also constructed. Shri Krishna Pandit along with other devotees while performing Puja, a 'Boj Patra' appeared floating in Amrit Kund on which following 'Shaloka' was written; 'I, prostrate to Supreme Goddess Maharajni who is lustrous having around twelve suns and seated on lion's throne, wrapped by the serpents, not visible to the material eyes but realized by spiritualist'. Shri Krishna Pandit composed a poem of as many stanzas as there were letters in the 'Shaloka' and this poem 'Rajani Stotra' is still extant. He would pay a visit to the Holy spring on every 8th day of the bright fortnight as long as he lived. Although, it is recorded that the discovery of the Holy spring was made on Ashara Saptami, 7th day of bright fortnight in June-July, but devotees throng this place on every 8th day (Ashtami), and annual festival is held on every Jyestha Sukla Ashtami.

It is recorded in Bhṛngisha Samhita (concluding paras) after killing Ravana by Shri Rama, 'From that date onwards on every fifteenth day of the bright fortnight of Assuj Shri Rama in the company of Sri Sita undertakes a pilgrimage (to Kheer Bhawani) in accordance with the prescribed ritual. On the 8th and 9th day of the bright half of the month of Assuj, Mandodari and Bibhishana visit this shrine respectively. The mighty Hanuman stands guard there for all the time to come.

The main Holy spring is dedicated to Mata Maharajni and has an irregular septagonal shape with apex called PAAD (feet) to the east. The northern and southern sides are longer than the western side which is called SHER (head). It is shaped like 'OM' in the Sharada script. In the centre is an islet on which a temple must have existed once. There also grew a mulberry tree here. The spring is situated in the centre of the island round which the Gang Khai, a canal from Sindh makes a circuit. It is said to be surrounded by 360 springs. Most of these are covered with bushes and silted up. In 1902, Pandit Ved Lal Dhar cleared the sedimentation of the main Holy spring which had occurred by



offerings made by devotees. The digging unearthed an ancient temple in the center built of large sculptured white stone with superb artistic features and marvelous images of our deities. The whole shrine was repaired by Maharaja Partap Singh, a pious Dogra King, in 1907 with the erection of marble structure and fencing on the old site in center of the spring. Maharajni is the Isht Devi of Kashmiri Pandits.

The Brahmins of Tulamula have been described in Rajatarangini as full with spiritual powers. Once the 'Jagir' of the priests of Tulamula was confiscated by King Jayapida who ruled Kashmir from 753 to 784 AD and one of the Brahmins of Tulamula named Pandit Ittila cursed him for his impious deeds when a golden pole of the canopy suddenly tumbled down upon the king from which he sustained serious injury resulting in his death.

In our scriptures, Hindu Deities are expressed in three manifestations ; (1)Ionic form (Wooden, Stone or Metal) (2) Mantra(Sound form) (3) Yantra (A mystic symbol). In our temples the Deities are usually worshiped in ionic forms. Bhakti is sure and simplest form of worship. The greatest Tantric teachers of Kashmir Acharya Utpal Dev and Abhinavagupta have given first place to Bhakti as an effective means for receiving the grace of Divine Mother. In Tantric cult, the devotees concentrate on mystic symbol or Yantra (geometrical abode of the deity) and are supposed to acquire superphysical powers. It is drawn by using the dot (Bindu), the straight lines, the triangle and the circle. Tantrikism is a way of worship. In Tantra Shastra, Maharajni has a prescribed diagram (Chakram) with Her Shaktis. Mantra is a sound form of the deity. It is chanted to invoke the deity in the mind, generally known as 'Dyanam'. According to Maharajni Pradurbhava the Mantra of Maharajni is a 15-worded Mantra. An appropriate ritual has to be followed while reciting the Mantra. With the grace of Maharajni the seeker can experience the Supreme Bliss. In nutshell, 'the Mantra is a sound body of the Deity while Tantra is its form.' Adi Sankaracharya has defined at length Mantra and Tantra in his 'Saundarya Lahari'. The famous five hymns in Yogic language in praise of Divine Mother, in 'Pancastavi' is very popular among the Kashmiri Pandits.

Swami Vivekananda visited thrice Tulmul during his stay in Kashmir. Soon after he had a vision of Mother Kali at a solitary place near Srinagar, Swami ji went to Kheer Bhawani on 30th September 1898. There he lived a life of intense austere and



devotion to the Mother for a week. His biography narrates the details of his stay at the shrine; 'Before this famous shrine of the Mother he daily performed Homa, and worshipped Her with offering Kheer made of one mound of milk, rice and almonds. Every morning he used to worship a Brahmin pandit's little daughter as Uma Kumari, the Divine Virgin.' When he returned to Srinagar, he appeared before his disciples a transfigured presence, writes Nivedita. 'No more Hari Om It is all Mother, Mother now' he said. One day at Kheer Bhawani he had been pondering over the ruination and desecration of the temple by the Muslim invaders. Mother spoke to him 'What, even if unbelievers should enter My temples and defile My images! What is that to you? Do you protect me? Or do I protect you?' At the same shrine, in course of worship one day, he wished in his heart that he were able to build a new temple in place of the one which is in dilapidated condition. He was startled in his ruminations by the voice of the Mother Herself, saying to him, 'My child! If I so wish I can have innumerable temples and magnificent monastic centers. I can even at this moment raise a seven storeyed golden temple on this very spot.' After that Swami ji said, "Since hearing that Divine Voice, I cherish no more plans. The idea of building Maaths etc. I have given up; as Mother wills, so it will be'. On this, one of his disciples asked, "Sir, you used to say that Divine Voices are the echo of our inward thoughts and feelings." Swami ji gravely said, "Whether it be internal or external, if you actually hear with your ears such a disembodied voice, as I have done, can you deny it and call it false? Divine Voices are actually heard, just as you and I are talking."

ABODE OF MAA SHARIKA — HARI PARBAT:

The sacred shrine of Maa Sharika on the hillock of Hari Parbat is in the heart of Srinagar city and is one of the oldest shrines of Kashmir. There is a legend associated with this hillock. A powerful demon lived nearby in water and harassed the Rishis. The Rishis prayed to Goddess Parvati to free them from the demon. The Goddess assumed the form of a bird called HAR in Kashmiri (mya) and dropped a celestial pebble at the spot where 'Jalodabhava' the water demon was lying. This pebble grew into a hillock and the demon was pinned to spot forever. The Goddess Mother in grateful memory of deliverance took up Her abode at the



hill-top and is worshiped as Sharika Bhagwati. The hill is hence called Hari Parbat — the hill of Sharika. It is believed, that this miracle happened on the day of Ashad Shukla Paksh Navami (Har Navam) and the devotees celebrate this day as birthday of Sharika Bhagwati with great reverence. This shrine is the abode of Mahashakti (Divine Mother Goddess DURGA). The eighteen-armed Goddess Sharika — Ashtadushbuja, is regarded one of the Isht Devi of Kashmiri Pandits. In Tantra Sastra Para-Shakti is known as Tripursundhari. The Gita speaks of Para Prakrti which is none other than Para-Shakti. The collective energy of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh is known as Tripura or Sri Tripursundhari. In Tantra, Shiva and Shakti are not two different entities. It is Shiva as Shakti. The appearance of both is like the two sides of the same coin. The dynamic aspect of the highest Reality is Para-Shakti and its static aspect is Parma-Shiva. The Upanisad says, "His (Para-Shiva's) Para-Shakti is manifold, as described in the Veda, the natural energies of knowledge, power and action. Jnana, Bala and Kriya correspond to Jnana Shakti, Iccha Shakti and Kriya Shakti respectively as explained in the Tantras also. These with the conjoint powers of concealing (Pidhana) and favouring (Anugraha) of Shiva constitute the five fold glory of Para-Shakti." Further Ksemaraja explains in Bhatta Narayana, "We bow to Shiva who, enjoining His five-fold glory reveals the spiritual Shakti, the power of consciousness and bliss." Para-Shakti is, the original source, the Supreme Mother, with five glorious natural energies.

'Chakreshwari Asthapan' atop Hari Parbat has been place of worship and pilgrimage from time immemorial. Sri Chakram is the abode of Para Devi manifested as 'Shila' there. The mystic Sri Chakram engraved on a vertical Holy rock (Shila) is located at the middle of western face of the shrine. This very Sila smeared with Sindhoor is the Holy shrine of Sri Chakrishwari. The Sri Chakram is a symbolic representation of the cosmic union of Lord Shiva and Shakti and is a famous Yantra. A verse from 'Rudra Yamala Tantra' describes Sri Chakram as; "The point, the group of 8 triangles, two groups 10 triangles, the group of 14 triangles, 8 petalled lotus, the 16 petalled lotus, the three circles and the quadrangular ramparts all round constitute the Sri Chakram of the Supreme Mother." In the Yantra (i) the inner group forming the central dimensionless point (Bindu), the primary triangle (Trikona) with its apex downwards and the figure of eight corners (Astakona) symbolize bliss, Laya or absorption, (ii) the middle group forming



the figure of ten angles (Antradasara), another figure of ten angles (Bahirdasara) and the figure of fourteen angles (Catur-dasara) symbolizes mastery over the worlds, preservation or Sthiti and (iii) the outer group consisting of the eight petalled lotus (Astadala-padma), the sixteen petalled lotus (Sodasa-dala-padma) and the square field (Bhupura) symbolize extension or Srsti. The devotees who concentrate on these Chakras are actually awakening their spiritual consciousness better known as Kundalini Shakti. The 'Kundalini' Yoga is the main theme of 'Pancastavi'. Faith and devotion are its characteristic. Its five Hymns are descriptive prayers to 'Tripurasundari' which is very common with Kashmiri Pandits. Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa has described Kundalini Shakti in his Gospel as, "The centre at the heart corresponds to the fourth plane of the Vedas. There is in this centre a lotus called 'Anahata' with 12 petals. The centre known as 'Vishudha' is the fifth plane. This centre is at throat and has a lotus with 16 petals. When the 'Kundalini' reaches this plane, the devotee longs to talk and hear only about God. A conversation on worldly subjects, on 'Kamini' and 'Kanchan', causes him great pain. He leaves a place where people talk of these matters. Then comes the sixth plane, corresponding to the centre known as 'Ajna'. The centre is located between the eyebrows and it has a lotus with two petals. When the 'Kundalini' reaches it, the aspirant sees the form of God. It is like a light inside a lantern. You may think you have touched the light but in reality you cannot because the barrier of the glass. At last of all is the seventh plane, which according to the 'Tantra', is the centre of the 1000 petalled lotus. When the 'Kundalini' arrives there, the aspirant goes into 'Samadhi'. In that lotus dwells 'Sat Chitanand Shiva' the absolute. The 'Kundalini', the awakened power, unites with 'Shiva'. This is known as Union of 'Shiva' and Shakti". (Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna pages 456&457)

The shrine of 'Chakreshwari' is also known as 'Pradyuman Peeth', 'Sidh Peeth', 'Shakti Peeth' and 'Sharika Peeth'. Bhagawti Mantra is of seven 'Bijaksharas' symbolic of Mother Sharika, seven Sages and seven Lokas. In Tantra Shastra, Udharkosa, is a unique Grantha. The first half includes 25 Patalas (paragraphs) and has been composed in the form of Adhyayas (chapters) dealing mainly with Bhijamantras of Gods and Goddess. Similarly, the other half contains 35 Adhyayas (chapters) which also deals in detail the Bhijamantras. The Mantra is verbal expression and Yantra or Sri Chakram is visual expression of Divine Mother. It is



perhaps due to the importance of Srichakram the capital city of Kashmir has derived its name and is known Srinagar (Srinagra).

On 'Navreh' (New Year Day of Kashmiri Pandits), during the month of Magh and Navratra days the devotees regularly visit the Hari Parbat for special prayers and worship. Some selected Shalok's of 'Sundaryalahari,' 'Pancastavi' and 'Durga Saptshati' dedicated to Divine Mother are also recited by devotees at the shrine. The spiritual lore enjoins that worshipping the Holy Feet of Divine Mother, is a stepping stone for the spiritual enlightenment. Adi Sankaracharya describes in a Shloka of his Saundarya Lahari, 'Whereas most Gods bestow the boon of fearlessness on their devotees by raising their right hand in Abhaya Mudra, Mother Goddess Durga bestows benedictions from Her Holy Feet. Those who bow their heads at the feet of Goddess Durga attain their cherished goal.'

Kallan's 'Rajatarangani' mentions Sharika Parbat (Hari Parbat) as the epicentre of spiritualism in Kashmir. The fact is that Hari Parbat has been cultural and religious place of Kashmiri Pandits since long. A number of Holy spots and temples are located on its all sides. The devotees undertake 'Parikrama' of whole of hillock. It would start from the Lord Ganesha's shrine (Ganishon), which is located on the south-western corner of the hillock. Lord Ganesha is again a huge 'Shila' smeared with 'Sindoor' worshipped both in the form of image and Yantra inside the temple. The 'Swastika' is also regarded as graphic symbol of Lord Ganesha. Before starting any religious ceremony Lord Ganesha is always first to be worshipped and invoked. This is considered very auspicious. Following the prayers at Mahaganesha, devotees move towards the rock known as 'Sapat Rishi', with which the earliest scientific calendar devised by Kashmiri Pandits and now 5082 years old is associated, is worshipped. Further on, to the four Chinars known as 'Lal Ded's Bonee' and then to small temple of Mahakali. In front of Kali temple is large chunk of land known as 'Sidh Peeth'. It is said great saints of Kashmir, Rish Peer, Krishna Kar, Sahib Koul and others, have meditated here and attained divinity. It was here Pandit Madhav Dhar, an ardent devotee of Divine Mother, was granted a boon by 'Bhagwati' and as desired a daughter, saint - poetess Roop Bhavani, much revered by Kashmiri Pandits, was born. After Sidh-Peeth, the next is 'Devi Agan' face to face with 'Chakreshwari temple' at the hilltop, a flight of 108 stairs. Devotees then move



towards Mahalakshmi 'thapna' and on its left is 'Amber Koul' temple dedicated to Lord Krishna'. The resting place of Abhinava Gupta, the well known founder of Kashmiri Shaivism is also associated with Hari Parbat.

A long trail of about a kilometer enroute is Pokri-Bal. It is situated well below the hillock on the banks of Nagin Lake. Pokri means spring and Bal as place. The place of springs. The Holiest of them is known Amrit Kund—the spring of nectar. This is a square shaped clear water spring, surrounded by chinar trees. An ancient Shiva temple stands overlooking Holy Kund. The Amrit Kund is the place where the Holy feet of Goddess Sharika are supposed to rest and the divine nectar flows. This Holy water is sacred and refreshing to devotees, who reach there after a long 'Parikrama' of Hari Parbat. The shrine of Mother Raghnya is a part of Pokribal complex, besides number of rest rooms, a community kitchen and other facilities are also available for the devotees. The blessings of Divine Mother have been sought and invoked by the Kashmiri Pandits through Yagnyas and community prayers. Special puja would be offered on certain auspicious days. On 'Hura Ashtami', on the eve of Shivratri devotees would cluster around the Amrit Kund and recite Sholakas from the scriptures and sing bajans collectively throughout the night. Next morning 'Tehri' (yellow cooked rice) is distributed as 'Prasada'. Many pious souls are believed to have attained salvation at this Holy shrine. In more recent times known great saints like Swami Anand Ji, Swami Razdan Sahib, Swami Sona Kak Ji, Swami Nand Lal Ji have been blessed by Bagwati. It is said, Bhagwan Gopinath Ji had a glimpse of Goddess Sharika in the form of a small girl who came swirling to him and sat in his lap. Swami Bal Ji Kao also attained salvation at Pokribal and then moved to Ishber for further penance.

Before devotees reach exit gate (Kathidarwaza) there is a small Hanuman temple at the right side of the foothill. Lord Hanuman, the God of strength, is a very popular deity, possibly because He is said to be easily propitiable and believed to be bestowing quick reward to his devotees. This is the last Holy spot on the 'Parikrama' route. There used to be orchards of almonds (Badam Vari) around the hill in bygone days and a great place to go around in spring when almonds would be in full blossom known as 'Badam Phulai'. Many people would throng this place and enjoy the scenic beauty and religious flavour.



ABODE OF MATA JAWALA JI — KHREW

Mata Jawala ji, the Goddess of Fire, is another Isht Devi of Kashmiri Pandits situated on a hillock in the village of Khrew about 23 kms away in south-east of Srinagar. The shrine of Jawala ji was constructed by Raja Daya Krishan Koul in eighteenth century. It is approachable by a flight of 360 steps made of dressed stone. The octagonal shaped temple rests on an 18 feet high base. The Sanctum Sanctorum is an 8 by 8 feet square shaped structure. The ceiling of wide dome was decorated with 'Khatamband' design, which has now started decaying and crumbling at several places. Mata Jawala ji remained physically manifest in the form of 'Jyoti' at the hill top. A 6 feet 'Shila' smeared with 'Sindoor' is inside the temple. This sacred 'Shila' has naturally carved mystical lines forming Tri-konas and 'Shat-konas' forming Sri Chakram. It is said that the image turned black due to the occasional flames which sparked here from time to time.

According to Kalhana, village Khrew in 'Rajtarangini' has been referred to as 'Khaduvi' where 360 springs of fresh water existed in ancient times. Above the village, a Svayambhu-Chakra or 'mystical diagram' was shown on a rock. At present, three prominent springs still exist, the most important is 'Bod Naag' near the temple. It is also known as 'Nagbal'. There is no 'Linga' inside the temple but a number of 'Shivaligas' exist around all the springs. A 600 years old idol of Laxmi Narayan exists near 'Bod Naag'. Another 900 years old idol of Maa Maharajini is on the west of the temple. The springs of Khrew have perennial source of fresh water which come straight from the mountain glaciers. The water of 'Nagbal' which flowed through the village as a big stream is known as 'Kol'. The water is crystal clear, 1 to 2 feet deep and steeper downwards. Its width varies from 5 to 10 meters. After traversing a distance of about 5 miles, this 'Kol' joins Vitasta (Jehlum) at Pampore. On the left side of the 'Jawala Parbat' is the revered hill of 'Vishnu Pad'. At the top of the hill is the foot mark of 'Lord Vishnu'. In ancient times, pilgrims used to climb this hill and worship Lord Vishnu but it has absolutely gone into oblivion. On Ashad Shukla Chaturdashi, (14th bright fortnight of June-July) every year, a great festival is held at Krew to celebrate the birthday of Mata Jawala Ji.

BALA TRIPURASUNDARI, ————— BALAHAMA;



The Shrine of Bala Devi in village Balhama , named after Goddess, is 13 kms. from Srinagar and is surrounded by village Wayun in the east, Zewan in north and Pampore in the west. The shrine is connected by a link road and is about 2 kms. from Pampore. Earlier the shrine was open from all sides, but it has been fenced in 1975. This ancient shrine has a Shiv Linga, around the five sacred devdar trees, there are twenty stone idols of Gods and Goddesses. The three eyed Bala Devi has the moon crescent above her forehead, she has in her hands the book and beads, the other two hands are in Abhay and Dhyana Mudra. She is of red complexion and wears red clothes.

Sri Bala Devi is mentioned in Mahakala-Samhita, Mantra Mahodadhi, Sri Lali Topakhyan and Haritayan Samhita or Tripura-Rahasya. According to Sri Lali Topakhyan which forms part of Brahmand Purana, (Chapter 22), it is mentioned Sri Bala Devi is the daughter of Sri Lalit Maha Tripura Sundari. At the age of nine years she became terribly angry after seeing Bandasura and his thirty sons who were marching ahead for a war. Bala Devi requested her Mother Maha Bhatarika Sri Lalita Tripura Sundari to allow her to fight Bandasura. Her Mother was reluctant to grant permission because of her tender age. After great persuasion she got it. Apart, from Mother's blessings she got a shield for her protection, then she proceeded on a chariot towards the battle field. After an intense fight she was able to kill the thirty sons of Bandasura. Haritayan Samhita or Tripura-Rahasya, (Chapter 63), Bala Devi at the age of eight years is said to have fought Bandasura without the permission of her Mother. She went quietly to battle field on a chariot followed by Mantrani and Dandani. She was able to pierce the mighty forces of Bandasura with her arrows, then she confronted Kutilash, the commander of the forces, riding on a mighty elephant and killed him. Afterwards she confronted the 'asura'. Instead of attacking Bala Devi, Bandasura showered flowery arrows on her. Seeing this the charioteer of Devi was astonished and asked the Devi the reason for the same. The Devi said, "In the last incarnation Bandasura was 'Mahadoot' of Sri Lakshmi and his name was Manik Shekhar. He was an ardent devotee of Bhagwati Lalita Maha Tripura Sundari. Because of the curse on him, he became 'asura' and was told to earn salvation only by being killed by me. Knowing that I am the daughter of Sri Lalita Amba he is worshipping me."



After defeating the 'asura', Devi returned to her abode, Sripuri.

According to folklore, the original abode of Bala Devi is in South India. It is said that the saint of the temple had a dream in which Devi told him to visit Kashmir, where he can have her Darshan. The saint along with his devotees as per the divine blessings visited the village of Balhama which was a dense forest at that time. The Goddess gave Darshan to the saint in a spring. In order to keep the sanctity of the shrine She directed him to plant trees around the spring. The saint planted fine saplings of 'devdar' trees around the spring, which in the course of time grew to full size and covered the entire spring, but unfortunately, this spring is not visible today. The five 'devdar' trees are believed to be more than five thousand years old and are principle object of veneration.

Sri Bala Devi is the Ishat Devi of Dogra rulers. Maharaja Partap Sing, used to walk bare foot for about a kilometer to reach this shrine. Every year 'Havan' was performed in the month of Mag Tik Chorum and in 'Haar' on Haar Chourm. Devotees used to worship by reciting the hymns in the praise of Goddess and milk was offered.

Gangbal—Haridwar Of Kashmir:

Gangbal is situated on the hills of Harmukh range in north-east of Kashmir, at a height of 12000 feet. It is surrounded in abundance by natural beauty. It is also the abode of Lord Shiva from whose hair locks (Jattas) the Holy Ganga flows down forming a divine lake. This is centuries old pilgrimage center of Kashmiri Pandits. It is on the Ganderbal-Sonamarg road, the last village Wusan is about 20Kms. from Srinagar, there onwards the hilly track is to be covered on foot. Ramradhan is the first pilgrimage center about 5 Kms. from Wusan. Onward journey to Yam Haer, is about 6kms. It is a steep ladder-like path, perhaps that is why it is called Yam Haer (Lord Yama's Ladder). After covering it, there is a lake with black water known as 'Bramsaar'. This lake has also divine sanctity. Another stop is at Hamsdar, a beautiful place surrounded by snow clad mountains, is known as gateway of Gangabal. It is now a steep journey towards Sukh Nag, a hot water lake, and then to Dukh Nag, a cold water lake. Pilgrims take bath in both these lakes and proceed finally to Gangabal lake



which is just 5kms. away from this place. Gangabal is also called Karmukat Ganga and is believed that this place as pious as Haridwar. The pilgrims perform shradh and immerse the ashes of their dead here. As the legend goes, pilgrims seek for the salvation of the souls of their deceased and pray for their own welfare. The water of this lake is pure and clean but surprisingly after the immersion of the ashes, all of a sudden a large number of insects appear on the surface of lake thus making water unuseable at that spot.

The return journey is from different route via Naran Nag. It is on banks of a rivulet called Krenk Nadi with beautiful temples around. Karakota King Laltaditya Muktapida enlarged and embellished the Jyesthesha and Bhutesha temples at Naran Nag. The temples made of local grey granite are situated in the midst of deep green pine forests. The Jyesthesa temple complex is on a high terrace to the west and the Bhutesa temple complex is on lower terrace. The ashes of the deceased are immersed in the Krenk Nadi as well. The pilgrims have a holy dip here as concluding part of the holy pilgrimage. Annual festival at Gagabal is held on the Ashtami of Bahadun Shulapaksh in Bhadra month, known as Ganga Ashtami.

Muslim rulers of Kashmir had imposed ban on the religious rites of Pandits, which included the immersion of ashes of their deceased in the Gangabal lake. Later the ban was lifted. It is said, that in same year nearly 10,000 Kashmiri Pandits, who had preserved the ashes of their dead, ventured to go to this holy place for the immersion of the ashes and perform Shrada there. But unfortunately, it rained and snowed heavily en-route and most of them lost their lives due to extreme cold.



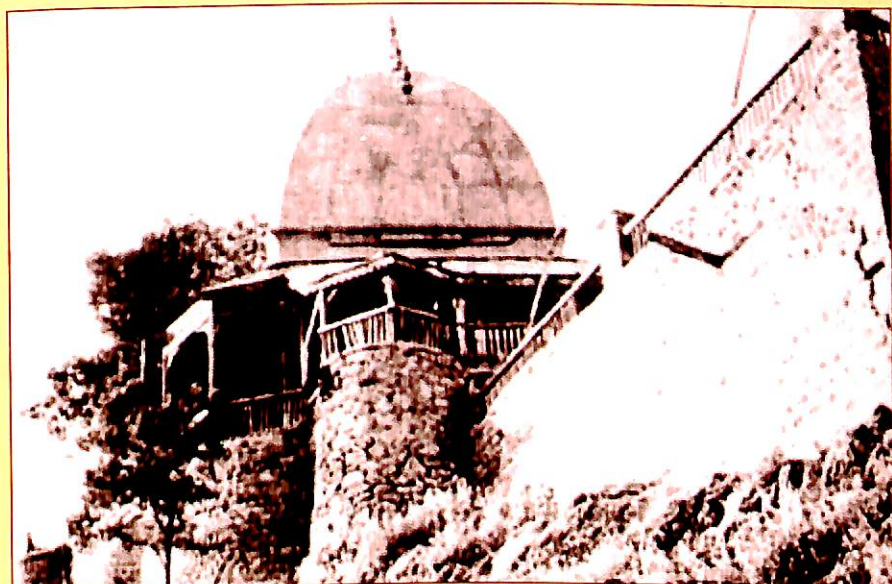
“सर्वमंगल मांगल्ये शिवे सर्वार्थ साधिके ।

शरण्ये त्रयम्बके गौरि नारायणि नमोस्तुते ।

‘O! Mother Goddess, You are giver of Success in every thing. O, Mother Goddess of Success, You are giver of all types of Protections and Peace as Shivi. You are as well Gouri in fruition of endeavors of all those who Surrender to you. In Your capacity as Narayani, You are remover of all types of Troubles.’

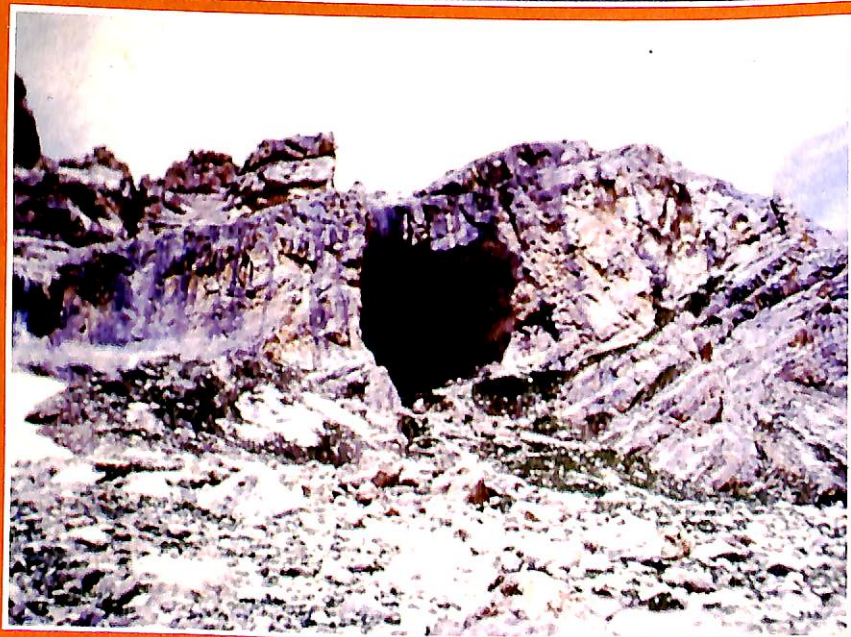


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